LEARN ONE THING EVERY DAY

APRIL 1 1919

SERIAL NO. 176

THE MENTOR

MAKERS OF MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

(*MEN*)

By
HOWARD W. COOK

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

VOLUME 7
NUMBER 4

TWENTY CENTS A COPY

THE LIGHT OF POETRY

MANY attempts have been made to define poetry for the layman. The eminent critic, the late E. C. Stedman, gave us the best brief definition: "Poetry is rhythmical, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion and insight of the human soul."

In a contest of the Poetry Society (New York) a prize was awarded for the best definition of poetry to Annie L. Laney, who describes it as follows:

The magic light that springs
From the deep soul of things
When, called by their true names,
Their essence is set free;
To word, illuminate,
Showing the soul's estate,
Baring the hearts of men;
Poetry!

"Our human minds," observes a poet and critic, "are like so many imperfect and distorted mirrors in which The One is reflected in a million apparently irreconcilable variations. Now and then, however, the mist lifts for the fraction of a second before a small part of the mirror of our minds, and a poem is born. Then we realize that the color of the dying leaf is one and the same with the tint of the setting sun, that the rippling laughter of a child is not only akin to, but is the ripple of the fountain. The soft syllable of a mother's lullaby and the notes that fall like blossoms from the flute-player's lips are but different cadences of the self-same voice of God. The reason why an apt figure of speech thrills us so strangely is because the poet, by means of this figure of speech, stretches an invisible thread of gold between our hearts and the heart of God. Every poem that does this, however imperfectly, is a true poem."

THE MENTOR ASSOCIATION

ESTABLISHED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POPULAR INTEREST IN ART, LITERATURE, MUSIC, SCIENCE, HISTORY, NATURE AND TRAVEL

THE MENTOR IS PUBLISHED TWICE A MONTH

BY THE MENTOR ASSOCIATION, INC., AT 114-116 EAST 16TH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y. SUBSCRIPTION, FOUR DOLLARS A YEAR. FOREIGN POSTAGE 75 CENTS EXTRA. CANADIAN POSTAGE 50 CENTS EXTRA. SINGLE COPIES TWENTY CENTS. PRESIDENT, THOMAS H. BECK; VICE-PRESIDENT, WALTER P. TEN EYCK; SECRETARY, W. D. MOFFAT; TREASURER, J. S. CAMPBELL; ASSISTANT TREASURER AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY, H. A. CROWE.

APRIL 1st, 1919 VOLUME 7 NUMBER 4

Entered as second-class matter, March 10, 1913, at the postoffice at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

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THE MENTOR · DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE
SERIAL NUMBER 176

MAKERS OF MODERN AMERICAN POETRY *(Men)*

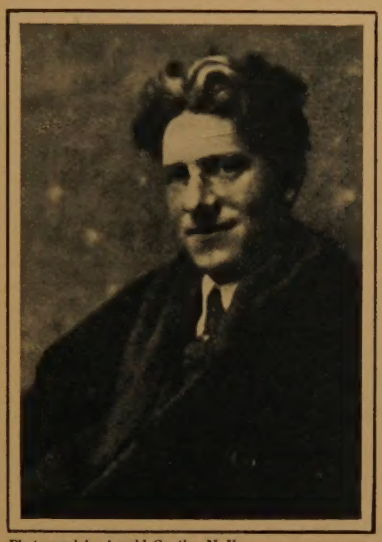
By HOWARD WILLARD COOK, Author of "Our Poets of Today"

MENTOR GRAVURES

HENRY VAN DYKE

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

WITTER BYNNER



Photograph by Arnold Genthe, N. Y.
PERCY MACKAYE

MENTOR GRAVURES

JOYCE KILMER

PERCY MACKAYE

ROBERT SERVICE

WHETHER or not the so-called renaissance in American poetry found its origin in World War reactions or in a natural growth development from Walt Whitman, certain it is that these two forces have been at work among American poetry-makers of today.

Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay have fostered a type of unusual and distinctive verse, and have achieved for themselves a style in poetry-making that is in marked contrast to that of such lyric* singers as Witter Bynner and Joyce Kilmer. These competing forces in American poetry, however, have depended on style rather than on theme. Thanks to these contrasting methods of interpretation, the period has been rich in poetry, and conspicuously so in its war-inspired verse. This was to be expected, for those that went and those that stayed behind have of necessity found in the war material for graphic pictorial verse and deep spiritual expression. The result is that the United States in little more than a year of warfare has added to her literary archives many poems that stand worthily beside English and French war verse.

*Lyric verse is that form of poetry whose object is to give expression to personal thought and emotion; poetry of sentiment. It is graceful and rhythmic in meter and conforms to regular metric rules. Much lyric verse is set to music.

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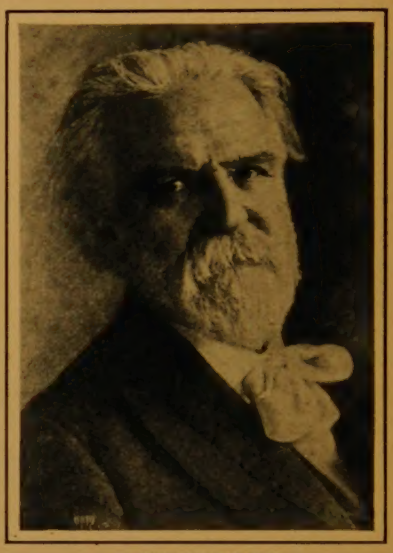
Poets of Yesterday and Today

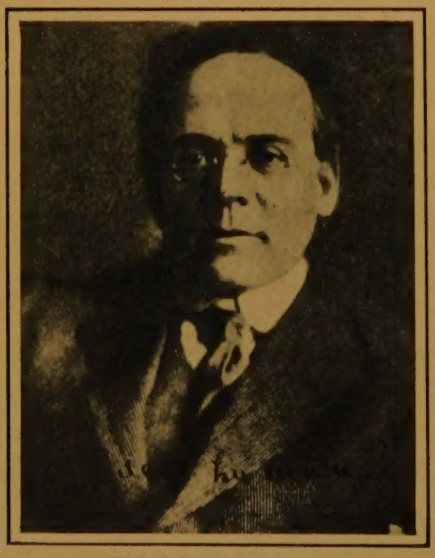


EDWIN MARKHAM

Preceding the recognized "arrival" of Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, and linking an earlier poetry period with the poetic ideals that began so short a time before the war and that carried on through to its conclusion, came Dr. Henry van Dyke and Edwin Markham. Dr. van Dyke, essayist and poet, sings delightfully of out-door life, of fresh spring days and flowers, of lazy fishermen and little rivers. Markham writes of Democracy and its ideals, and of those men that have best emphasized its true meaning. His "Man With the Hoe" and "Lincoln" are poems that should be read by every citizen of every republic. "The Man With the Hoe" was inspired by Millet's famous painting and was first published in 1899, when it was hailed as Democracy's battle-cry for the next thousand years.

Realists and Vers Libre

Among the narrative, realistic verse-makers, Edgar Lee Masters has achieved a place of high honor. In "Spoon River Anthology" he introduced a distinctively new note into American poetry. Critics protested that it was not poetry; other critics said that a new voice had been heard, a new genius found. He was praised; he was condemned, but "Spoon River" has come to stay. The book is a collection of poems purporting to be the after-death revelations of soul truths—tombstone chronicles and epitaphs as they should be written if written by Truth. There is a connecting narrative link in many of the poems and the same character appears for comment on several occasions. His story of the milliner is a fair example of Spoon River theme and style:



EDGAR LEE MASTERS

I was the milliner
Talked about, lied about,
Mother of Dora,
Whose strange disappearance
Was charged to her rearing.
My eye quick to beauty
Saw much besides ribbons
And buckles and feathers
And leghorns and felts,
To set off sweet faces,

And dark hair and gold.
One thing I will tell you
And one I will ask:
The stealers of husbands
Wear powder and trinkets,
And fashionable hats.
Wives, wear them yourselves.
Hats may make divorces—
They also prevent them.
Well now, let me ask you:
If all of the children, born here in
Spoon River
Had been reared by the County,
somewhere on a farm;
And the fathers and mothers had
been given their freedom
To live and enjoy, change mates
if they wished,
Do you think that Spoon River
Had been any the worse?

Carl Sandburg, with his "Cornhuskers" and "Chicago Poems," follows closely in Masters' footsteps. Roy Helton, a new voice, offers a not dissimilar quality of poetry in "Outcasts of Beulah Land"—poetry about the selfsame sort of people that O. Henry loved to write about—in a style that partakes of both Masters and Sandburg.

As for Ezra Pound, one may get no better summary of his own unusual *vers libre** than in these lines of Sandburg: "All talk on modern poetry, by people who know, ends with dragging in Ezra Pound somewhere. He may be named only to be cursed as wanton and mocker, poseur, trifler and vagrant. Or he may be classed as filling a niche today like that of Keats in a preceding epoch. The point is, he will be mentioned."

Pound's first book, "A Lume Spento" was published in Venice in 1908, an imaginative, passionate collection of verse that brought to its creator a following of novelty-seeking admirers.

Among these non-formal stylists the name of Benjamin de Casseres is prominent. He is a poet with a rare and large vocabulary, an understanding of colorful values, and his best work has been collected into a little volume called "The Shadow Eater." But his poems are *caviar* and should be taken in small quantities. Even then they are sometimes difficult to digest.

Another writer of the *vers libre* school is John Gould Fletcher, who ranks in the fore of the so-called "imagist" poets. Imagism is a presentation, not a representation, as exemplified in Fletcher's poem "The Calm," conforming to the imagists' idea of not speaking of the sea as "the rolling wave" or the "vasty deep," but in vivid picturing, thus:

At noon I shall see waves flashing,
White power of spray.
The steamers, stately,
Kick up white puffs of spray behind them.
The boiling wake
Merges in the blue-black mirror of the sea.

JOYCE KILMER, Aged 5
From a photograph in possession of his mother, Mrs. Kilburn Kilmer

*According to its generally accepted meaning, *vers libre* (free verse) is poetry written without regard to meter—combining truth, beauty and music in a free form of verse.

Conrad Aiken, poet of the philosophical, portrays the feelings of every sensitive beauty-loving youth whose interest is in dreams rather than cold realism. In "The Jig of Forslin" Aiken showed the dream world in perpetuation, and more poems of youthful dreams in his "Nocturne of Remembered Spring." Poetry readers that love youth—and their number must be legion—cannot afford to miss knowing Conrad Aiken.

WITTER BYNNER

Lyric Poets

Following the best traditions of orthodox verse-making, not always, however, orthodox in subject, come Witter Bynner, Joyce Kilmer, Clement Wood, Harry Kemp, and Bliss Carman. Bynner made a little sojourn into free verse in "Spectra" and "The Beloved Stranger," and presents something of a dual personality in his two-fold ability for poetical expression; he is equally happy in free and lyric verse.

There is Oriental blood flowing in the veins of Witter Bynner, and perhaps it is due to this ancestral heritage that the prophetic utterances found in our greatest poets are so strongly developed in him. This is evidenced time and again in his writings.

As for Bynner's religion, there is no small trace of a deference to Buddha in some of his poems—no doubt again an inheritance. For example:

Behold the man alive in me,
Behold the man in you!
If there is God—am I not he?—
Shall I myself undo?

I have geen waiting long enough . . .
Impossible gods, good-by;
I wait no more. The way is rough—
But the god who climbs is I.

Bynner, Wood and Kemp are all young, and, while they have achieved much, will achieve more. They contribute to some of the best known magazines, and, through their writings, have done much to foster a love for lyric verse among poetry readers, equaled only by the efforts of Sara Teasdale. Kemp's works include "Judas," "The Cry of Youth," and "The Thresher's Wife." Wood's first volume of verse, "Glad of Earth," was published in 1907.

ALAN SEEGER

William Stanley Braithwaite, who in recent years has become known rather as a critic and anthologist, has, however, himself achieved some noteworthy lyrics of distinctive charm and value. He is a contributor to the Boston *Transcript*, and has several anthologies and books of verse to his credit.

Bliss Carman, for many years a popular poet,

has a large list of published volumes to his credit. He is a lyric singer of sweetness and occasionally of power, whose muse has dwelt largely on the ideal to be found in real life, and especially communes with the soul of Nature.

Soldier Poets

Joyce Kilmer, Alan Seeger, and Charles Divine are most conspicuous among our soldier poets, if one wishes to draw a line between the States and Canada that would exclude those three Canadian poets—Robert Service, John McCrae and Jesse Edgar Middleton. Seeger's, McCrae's and Kilmer's work is finished. They "gave the full measure of devotion," but Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" and McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" will live on as two of the best loved and hence best known poems that have come out of the war. Both of these poems have been translated into many languages, and while Seeger may have done finer things from a standpoint of workmanship, his immortal lines which conclude as follows have struck a universal note:

BLISS CARMAN

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear . .
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

There is an easily distinguished kinship in these and the lines of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," perhaps the most widely read and admired of the war verses. Here one finds a rare poetical quality that could have found inspiration no other place save on those war-scarred battle-fields:

* * * * * * * * *

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved; and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you, from failing hands, we throw
The torch. Be yours to hold it high!
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

Middleton in his "Sea Dogs and Men at Arms" writes in pleasing maritime meter of sailor men in war times. Charles Divine's verse has all the freshness and joy of a young poet. We find in "City Ways and Company Streets," his first book of collected verse, a mixture half tears, half laughter, that portrays with whimsical understanding the frailties of flesh-and-blood humans. He has been called, and perhaps with a deal of prophetic

truth, the American Kipling, though one has but to read his lines on "The Lavender Lantern" to realize that his technic and humor are his own:

ROBERT W. SERVICE

I wonder who is haunting the little snug café,
That place, half restaurant and home, since we have gone away;
The candled dimness, smoke and talk, and tables brown and bare—
But no one thinks of tablecloths when love and laughter's there.

I wonder if it's crowded still, three steps below the street,
Half hidden from the passing town, where even poets eat;
I wonder if the girls still laugh, the girls whose art was play;
I wonder who the fellows are that try to make them gay.

Some said it was Bohemia, this little haunt we knew,
Where hearts were high and fortunes low, and onions in the stew;
I wonder if it's still the same, the after-dinner ease—
Bohemia is in the heart, and hearts are overseas.

Oh, great were all the problems that we settled there, with wine,
And fates of many nations were disposed of, after nine,
But France has braved a fate that brought us swarming to her shore—
I wonder who is sitting at the table near the door.

I wonder who is haunting the little snug café,
That place, half restaurant and home, since we have gone away;
I wonder if they miss me, I don't suppose they do,
As long as there are art and girls, and onions in the stew.

While "The Songs of a Sourdough" and "The Ballads of a Cheechako" established the just fame of Robert Service as a poet, he has done the best of his writing so far in "The Rhymes of a Red Cross Man." As an ambulance driver across the shell-torn fields of Flanders he too saw and lived and felt the things that he has set down so well in this book. And in the concluding stanza of "Young Fellow My Lad," Service presents in his own best style the spiritual side of those words, "Carry on":

CHARLES ("CHICK") DIVINE

So you'll live, you'll live, Young Fellow My Lad,
In the gleam of the evening star,
In the wood-note wild and the laugh of the child,
In all sweet things that are.
And you'll never die, my wonderful boy,
While life is noble and true;
For all our beauty and hope and joy
We will owe to our lads like you.

Joyce Kilmer was not so much a poet of the war as were these other men. His best

known poem—great and simple as it is—was written before he entered the service that was to end in his death. The poem, "Trees," has no superior among the various tributes that have been offered to these majestic beings of nature's handiwork by any of the so-called nature poets:

RICHARD MANSFIELD, 2d, AND HIS MOTHER

This picture was taken on the afternoon of young Mansfield's departure for camp at San Antonio, Texas, where he died in April, 1918. His book of poems, "Courage," has placed him high among the present-day singers

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

A True Minstrel Poet

Vachel Lindsay (his christian name rhymes with Rachel) is the only minstrel poet we have that carries on the true heritage of his medieval forerunners. He travels from town to town singing his song, and obtaining his shelter and food by the music of his spoken verse when the spirit moves him. But he finds time as well to write for magazines and in book form American songs, songs that range from humblest Negro melodies to impressive Niagara-like tributes. Lindsay is a great believer in the value of the spoken word, and has attained a unique reputation not alone for the things he writes but because he is the only American poet to chant his own songs before large audiences. One must hear Lindsay declaim his verses aloud to get their full value, but something of his gift may be judged by these lines from his "Song of the Congo," one of his best poems:

ROBERT FROST

Just then from the doorway, as fat as shotes,
Came the cake-walk princes in their long red coats,
Canes with a brilliant lacquer shine,
And tall silk hats that were red as wine.
And they pranced with their butterfly partners there,
Coal-black maidens with pearls in their hair,
Knee-skirts trimmed with the jessamine sweet,
And bells on their ankles and little black feet.

Following Whitman

Many of our poets of today, like Louis Untermeyer in "These Times," and Berton Braley, who writes sympathetically of tug-boats and coal miners, have endeavored to find their guide in the best traditions handed down by Whitman. While it is the spirit of Whitman that is being carried on in our best and most idealistic American poetry, no one poet has so well assimilated this spirit in his own work as has Frederick Mortimer Clapp. In "New York and Other Verses" he writes of the city, with style and descriptive ability that is imitative, without offense, of Whitman's own pictures of Manhattan. Here is a poet whose use of words achieves a descriptive value found in the work of few American poets. In his poem, "The Warehouses," he writes:

A "CLOSE-UP" OF VACHEL LINDSAY

. . . The curd-white soaps that they make in Jaffa
crated in cubes and inert and labeled—
quantity, quality, weight and size;
and a hundred thousand sacks of grain
in which lies hidden
a whole fierce summer's sun on Dakotan prairies—
a hundred thousand sacks of grain
stacked like cubes and inert and labeled.
There are floors that groan with figs of Smyrna,
and Biskran dates;
there are cumquats from the Inland Sea,
crated and stacked and inert and labeled;
there are stiffened hides of a race of cattle
that hardly a year ago
filled the skies with the dust of their trampling
on Argentine plateaux,
bale upon bale and inert and labeled.

VACHEL LINDSAY

Poet and Playwright

In England and the United States Mr. MacKaye is famous as a writer of pageants and plays. He has opened the way in America for the community masque. He has introduced the muse of poetry in play form with admirable success and on a scale of tremendous proportions. Not that other poets have not delved into play-writing—many of them have done so—but MacKaye believes that much may be done for poets and their works through the medium of the stage, and that the door to this poetic outlet has been scarcely opened.

ALAN SEEGER IN SERVICE

LOUIS UNTERMEYER

Besides his successful "Caliban" and "The Scarecrow," and the splendidly written "Washington," Mr. MacKaye is also the author of rare lyrics and impressive poetic studies, designed in other form than for stage alone. He turns with equal ability from the "Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis," presented in the Missouri city in Forest Park on five successive days, to such tuneful lyrics as,

Frail Sleep, that blowest by fresh banks
Of quiet, crystal pools, beside whose brink
The varicolored dreams, like cattle, come to drink;
Cool Sleep, thy reeds, in solemn ranks,
That murmur peace to me by midnight's streams,
At dawn I pluck, and dayward pipe my flock of dreams.

Another Poetic Dramatist

Cale Young Rice is credited with having written some of the worthiest poetry of the last decade, as well as several of the best poetic dramas that American literature reveals. His books include the following titles, which give one an idea of the style of verse he has written: "Collected Plays and Poems," "At the World's Heart," "Porzia," "Far Quests," "The Immortal Lure," "Many Gods," "Nirvana Days," "A Night in Avignon," "Yolanda of Cyprus," "David," "Charles de Tocca," "Song-Surf," "Trials Sunward," and "Earth and New Earth."

Robert Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson

England first recognized the art of Robert Frost's poetry, poetry written in an earlier form of narrative verse, rather than lyric. He writes of the outdoors, and glories in such subjects as "Birches," "Pea Brush," "A Late Walk," "Wind and Window Flower" and "Blueberries." His verse shows a peculiarly effective dramatic power obtained by a careful use of language.

Amy Lowell, in her "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry," chose as one of her subjects Edwin Arlington Robinson. Protegé of the late Colonel Roosevelt, he is the author of poetry that is undeniably beautiful, but he produces much that is difficult for the layman to

understand. Some have called him a poet's poet. In twenty-five years he has published but four volumes of verse and two plays, his chief work being "The Man Against the Sky."

ANTHONY EUWER

Classic Poets

Conspicuous among the few purely classic poets that American literature has produced is Louis V. Ledouz, whose "Yzdra," a tragedy of the time before Christ, exemplifies the Helenic beauty and style of his verse.

John G. Neihardt writes with colorful pen, and achieves excellent pictures in all of his work, particularly in "The Song of Hugh Glass."

The thoughtful and philosophical poetry of George Edward Woodberry has made him a favorite among modern New England poets; in "The Flight and Other Poems" are some of the best examples of his soul-searching creations.

Newspaper Poets

There is a group of poets writing in America today that have attracted a large following among the thousands that devour the daily papers, and find food in weekly and monthly periodicals. Edgar Guest leads the group with a James Whitcomb Riley style of verse. Thomas A. Daly comes next with his unique characterizations of American immigrants and a rare sense of humor. There is Frank Stanton of the Atlanta *Constitution;* Don Marquis of the New York *Evening Sun;* and Christopher Morley, who conducts a column on the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger*. Some of the latter's delightful bits have been gathered together in "Songs for a Little House." Edward Van Zile and Samuel Minturn Peck have an appreciative following. Charles Hanson Towne and John Curtis Underwood have made contributions to American poetry, and while they write in a style somewhat different to that of the so-called newspaper poets, their appeal is one of strong popularity.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

The most interesting revelation in our poetry renaissance is the fact that time has disproved the theory that poetry is for "highbrows" only. Written for all people, with the thought that universal chords must be touched, we find readers eagerly seeking the product of our poets of the day and lending a ready and understanding ear to their songs.

BIRCHES

By ROBERT FROST

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter, darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away,
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.

A CHARM

For our new fireplace, to stop its smoking

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

O wood, burn bright; O flame, be quick;
O smoke, draw cleanly up the flue—
My lady chose your every brick
And sets her dearest hopes on you!

Logs cannot burn, nor tea be sweet,
Nor white bread turn to crispy toast,
Until your charm be made complete
By love, to lay the sooty ghost.

And then, dear books, dear waiting chairs,
Dear china and mahogany,
Draw close, for on the happy stairs
My brown-eyed girl comes down for tea!

PRIVATE "CHICK" DIVINE IN CAMP
The young poet considers the typewriter mightier than the pen

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

OUR POETS OF TODAY *By Howard Willard Cook*

TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY *By Amy Lowell*

AMERICAN POETRY *By Percy H. Boynton*

STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETS *By M. C. Sturgeon*

PRESENT-DAY AMERICAN POETRY *By Harry H. Peckham*

*** Information concerning the above books may be had on application to the Editor of The Mentor.

THE OPEN LETTER

During the youthful period of the twentieth century the world has moved fast, and the arts and letters have kept pace. We have seen and read much that is new and strange, some of which has puzzled us greatly—art that seems not to have found itself and poetry that sounds from the land of never-never, and even beyond that. We are not afraid to venture occasionally on uncharted seas with artist or poet, but we like to feel confident that the poet-pilot that steers us knows at least where he is going; and when the disturbing thought comes to us that he is wilfully rocking the boat we are glad to get back to firm earth where the enduring things of art are grounded. From that secure point we can watch each new movement in art and literature judiciously and with some sense of perspective. The "latest thing" in art, then, interests us, but it does not concern us deeply. We are not members of the party. Let them sail where they choose: we will "wait, watch and listen." It is not the *latest* but the *best* that we want—and, as sure as the sun rises and sets, the *best* will come home to us in time.

★ ★ ★

The terms "cult," "circle" and "school" are familiar ones today. "Community idea" is one of the most recent. Art has its various "cults," poetry its "schools." For those that want to study the tendencies of the day—the flow of the varying currents in art and literature, these terms are convenient. I have always felt a distaste, however, for the grouping of poets. A poet is to me essentially an individual, and his message a personal one. And, while taking his message to heart, I don't want to spread my appreciation of him over a "school." I want to love him for himself alone with no thought of his literary relatives. Let us, therefore, read Mr. Cook's intelligent and sympathetic survey of our poets of today, without thought of any "school" of poetry. Let us read about these poets as individuals who have thought and felt "even as you and I," and have had the genius to read life's meaning in many things of our time that were vague and uncertain to us, and who have given eloquent tongue to many of our own heart yearnings and heart burnings. For that fine ministration we owe them much *individually*, and treasure them as new-found friends.

★ ★ ★

In making new friendships—in poetry as in life—there is a large margin for personal preference. Accepting no "school," we pick and choose our poets of today and give our affectionate tribute to those alone whose messages mean something vital to us. We are not in the least interested in the relative "greatness" of these poets. To call a poet "great" means little and describes nothing. The word "great" has been applied indiscriminately to all kinds of individuals. Allowing that the one that uses the word knows just what he means by it—which is seldom the case—who is there of all of us that can assume to determine who are the *great* in today's literature? What we want to know of the men and women that have achieved things is not how *great* they are but *what kind* of men and women they are, and what is the *nature* and *quality* of their achievements. Any critic who can tell us that does us a real service.

We need intelligent, discriminating criticism, for there is a wide difference of opinion concerning the poets of today. Their productions have caused much argument in the literary circles and in the market-place. For the latter fact let us be grateful, for poetry has been regarded by publishers these many years as a drug on the market, and if our young poets have stirred interest anew and attracted many readers, hitherto indifferent, they are to be devoutly thanked.

Let us see then what kind of men these poets be. Take notice—ye that have regarded poetry as something not for busy minds. Tarry awhile and read. In the wide range of present-day minstrelsy there are some songs that will surely reach your heart.

W. D. Moffat

EDITOR

OGRAPH BY PIRIE MACDONALD

HENRY VAN DYKE

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

ONE

HENRY VAN DYKE

THERE is a goodly list of writings to the credit of Henry van Dyke, who has given beautiful essays, prose poems and poetry to a large following of readers. His poetry is quoted as often, if not more frequently, than that of any other American poet of the twentieth century, and his verse always expresses the truth, beauty and music of the real poet. Dr. van Dyke is the great pastoral singer of America today—his nature themes are among the best that he chooses to write upon—his are the poems one would choose for companionship with a fishing pole in a rowboat on a lazy June day. His "Angler's Wish" is well worth quotation from his book "The Builders and Other Poems."

I.

When tulips bloom in Union Square,
And timid breaths of vernal air
  Go wandering down the dusty town,
Like children lost in Vanity Fair;

When every long, unlovely row
Of westward houses stands aglow,
  And leads the eyes toward sunset skies
Beyond the hills where green trees grow;

Then weary seems the street parade,
And weary books, and weary trade:
  I'm only wishing to go a-fishing;
For this the month of May was made.

II.

I guess the pussy-willows now
Are creeping out on every bough
  Along the brook; and robins look
For early worms behind the plough.

The thistle-birds have changed their dun,
For yellow coats, to match the sun
  And in the same array of flame
The Dandelion Show's begun.

The flocks of young anemones
Are dancing round the budding trees;
  Who can help wishing to go a-fishing
In days as full of joy as these?

III.

I think the meadow-lark's clear sound
Leaks upward slowly from the ground,
  While on the wing, the bluebirds ring
Their wedding-bells to woods around.

The flirting chewink calls his dear
Behind the bush; and very near,
  Where water glows, where green grass grows,
Song-sparrows gently sing, "Good cheer."

And best of all, through twilight's calm
The hermit-thrush repeats his psalm.
  How much I'm wishing to go a-fishing
In days so sweet with music's balm!

IV.

'Tis not the proud desire of mine;
I ask for nothing superfine;
  No heavy weight, no salmon great
To break the record, or my line:

Only an idle little stream,
Whose amber waters softly gleam,
  Where I may wade, through woodland shade,
And cast the fly, and loaf, and dream:

Only a trout or two, to dart
From foaming pools, and try my art:
  No more I'm wishing—old-fashioned fishing,
And just a day on Nature's heart.

Dr. van Dyke was born in Germantown, Pa., on November 10, 1852. His father, an eminent clergyman, moved to Brooklyn, N. Y., and the son received his schooling at the Polytechnic Institute of that city. He graduated there in 1869 and entered Princeton, where in 1873 he received his degree of Bachelor of Arts. Dr. van Dyke continued his studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and at American and foreign universities. He married Ellen Reid, of Baltimore, on December 13, 1881. Dr. van Dyke was ordained in the Presbyterian ministry in 1877 and was pastor of the United Congregational Church of Newport, R. I., from 1879 until 1882, when he was called to the Brick Presbyterian Church on Fifth Avenue, New York City. He held this distinguished charge for seventeen years, during which he became known not only as an eloquent preacher, but as a writer of essays and poetry. In 1900 he was called to the professorship of English literature in Princeton University. His work as a distinguished teacher of literature continued without intermission until 1913, when he was appointed Minister to Netherlands and the Duchy of Luxembourg. After his withdrawal from diplomatic service in 1917 Dr. van Dyke returned to his home, "Avalon," in Princeton, New Jersey.

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EDGAR LEE MASTERS

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

TWO

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

THERE has been no more striking figure in American poetry-making than Edgar Lee Masters, whose penetrating and merciless psychology in "Spoon River Anthology" marks one of the most conspicuous achievements in twentieth-century verse. "Spoon River Anthology" is a sequence of narrative poems dealing with the supposedly after-death "soul barings" of various "dear departeds" in the village of Spoon River. Here the good and the bad—regardless of earthly pose—are held up before the mirror of Truth with all their virtues and vices exposed in her fair white light. Here "Cassius Hueffer" says of himself:

> They have chiseled on my stone the words:
> "His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him
> That nature might stand up and say to all the world,
> This was a man."
> Those who knew me smile
> As they read this empty rhetoric.
> My epitaph should have been:
> "Life was not gentle to him,
> And the elements so mixed in him,
> That he made warfare on life,
> In the which he was slain."
> While I lived I could not cope with the slanderous tongues,
> Now that I am dead I must submit to an epitaph
> Graven by a fool!

It was while engaged in the practice of law that Edgar Lee Masters first began to write verse. He had, however, been producing for many years poetry of no especial significance before his Spoon River classics appeared.

Masters was born in Garnett, Kansas, on August 23, 1868. He received his education in a high school and at Knox College, Illinois, after which he studied law in his father's office. He was admitted in 1891 to the Bar, and is at present a member of the Chicago and Illinois State Bar Associations.

His works include "A Book of Verses," "A Maximilian," "The New Star Chamber and Other Essays," "Blood of the Prophets," "Althea," and "The Trifler," "Spoon River Anthology," "Toward the Gulf," and "Songs and Satires." He has contributed articles and essays on political and constitutional subjects to various periodicals and magazines.

Jessie B. Rittenhouse makes these interesting comments upon Masters' art:

"Edgar Lee Masters withholds nothing. Witness such a poem as 'Samuel Butler et Al,' where one indicts his mother for a life of recreance to the finer duties of motherhood, while he pictures with pitiless exactness the whole panorama of his life. This might be inexcusable, were it not true. We have all seen this woman and observed every detail that Mr. Masters depicts. Indeed, this book is full of first-hand studies, of minute observation. These souls under a microscope, however they might wish to escape, can withhold nothing. One marvels continually at the relentless analysis which probes deeper and deeper, seeking for the hidden springs of action. Only the trained mind, the legal mind, could pursue such clues and arrive at such unappealable decisions. Heredity has an irresistible fascination for Mr. Masters, and it appears and reappears in his latest work. In 'Excluded Middle' its effect upon a whole family is shown, in the light of that ever-baffling preoccupation of Mr. Masters—cross-currents of sex, and parental inharmony. Indeed, if we have both a penetrating and a luminous thinker in modern American poetry, it is Edgar Lee Masters, and one says this with full recognition of the fact that it is not always pleasant to follow him in his penetrations."

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BY PAUL THOMPSON

WITTER BYNNER

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

THREE

WITTER BYNNER

THAT prophetic genius that has ever been evidenced in all great minds is preeminent in Witter Bynner. Just as Walt Whitman saw into a future generation and wrote of a glorified democracy, so Bynner sees beyond an immediate present and writes with keen insight into the future. His poetry conforms both to the accustomed lines and to the less orthodox theme and meter, and in both forms he offers the best that American modern poetry has produced.

Witter Bynner was born in Brooklyn, New York, 1881. He received his early education in Massachusetts at the schools of Brookline. He was editor of the school paper, *The Sagamore*, and in 1902 took his degree at Harvard, where he had been one of the editors of *The Advocate*.

The editor's desk of McClure's Magazine next claimed his attention. There he stayed until 1906, when he became literary adviser to Small, Maynard & Company, later retiring to the artists' colony at Cornish, N. H., to engage in the business of poetry writing.

In 1907 "An Ode to Harvard and Other Poems" was published, followed by "Kit," a one-act play, two years afterward.

"An Immigrant," the Phi Beta Kappa poem of 1911, was his work—a radical piece of writing that startled his academic audience by its ardent plea for equal suffrage. This was the beginning of his public stand for suffrage, upon which he has spoken and campaigned ever since.

It is particularly by virtue of his "Grenstone Poems" that Witter Bynner has established himself among the poets whose work we shall hand down to the next generation. Here is a lyrical quality that is superb, a spirit of democracy and a love of free things that set forth our highest ideals.

"Grenstone Poems," form, by their sequence, a more or less definite narrative. A young poet, dejected, goes to the country town of Grenstone, where after a time he meets Celia—through whom not only life becomes rich for him, but death also.

"Grenstone Poems" was judged by Columbia University as one of the two best books of poetry published during 1917. A significant poem of the collection is the one from which the volume takes its name, "Grenstone":

"Is there such a place as Grenstone?"
Celia, hear them ask!—
Tell me, shall we share it with them?
Shall we let them breathe and bask

On the windy, sunny pasture,
Where the hill-top turns its face
Toward the valley of the mountain,
Our beloved place?

Shall we show them through our churchyard,
With its crumbling wall
Set between the dead and living?
Shall our willowed waterfall,

Huckleberries, pines and bluebirds,
Be a secret we shall share? . . .
If they make but little of it,
Celia, shall we care?

Mr. Bynner is a resident of New York, in which city the greater part of his work is done. His published poems include "Young Harvard and Other Poems," "Tiger," "The Little King," "The New World," "Iphigenia in Tauris," "Grenstone Poems," and "The Beloved Stranger." Mr. Bynner's most recent work is "The Golden Wing," a morality play.

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JOYCE KILMER

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

FOUR

JOYCE KILMER

WHILE Joyce Kilmer fell fighting for the great cause of Democracy, and contributed poems of rare beauty as a result of war-inspired emotion, his was a recognized genius that was in full bloom before he went "over there." His conversion to the Roman Catholic Church resulted in some of the most exquisitely spiritual poems found in American poetry, modern in style and thought and inspired by religious fervor. An example of this is found in "The Thorn":

> The garden of God is a radiant place,
> And every flower has a holy face:
> Our Lady like a lily bends above the cloudy sod,
> But Saint Michael is the thorn on the rose-bush of God.
>
> David is the song upon God's lips,
> And Our Lady is the goblet that He sips:
> And Gabriel's the breath of His command,
> But Saint Michael is the sword in God's right hand.
>
> The Ivory Tower is fair to see,
> And may her walls encompass me!
> But when the Devil comes with the thunder of his might,
> Saint Michael, show me how to fight!

Joyce Kilmer was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, December 6, 1886. He attended Rutgers College between 1904 and 1906, and secured his degree of Bachelor of Arts in Columbia University in 1908. He married Aline Merry of Norfolk, Virginia, in 1908. Upon receiving his degree, he became an instructor in Latin in the High School at Morristown, New Jersey. But this appealed to him only a short time, and in 1909 he became an editorial assistant on the Standard Dictionary, was later on the editorial staff of *The Churchman*, and in 1913 was a member of the staff of the *New York Times Book Review*. Much of his verse appeared in such publications as *The Bellman*, *The Boston Transcript*, *Collier's*, *The Outlook* and *The Catholic World*.

Just seventeen days after Congress declared war, Kilmer, leaving behind his wife and four children, enlisted in the 7th Infantry and soon attained the office of sergeant. He was acting unofficially in the 165th Infantry of the Old Rainbow Division as adjutant to Major Wm. J. Donovan when he met death July 30 near Villers-sur-Fère, and none in command surpassed the American poet-soldier in courage, according to his comrades.

Christopher Morley, a friend of Kilmer's, wrote of him as follows: "Joyce Kilmer died as he lived—'in action.' He found life intensely amusing, unspeakably interesting; his energy was unlimited, his courage stout. He attacked life at all points, rapidly gathered its complexities about him, and the more intricate it became the more zestful he found it. Nothing bewildered him, nothing terrified. By the time he was thirty he had attained an almost unique position in literary circles. He lectured on poetry, he interviewed famous men of letters, he was poet, editor, essayist, critic, anthologist. He was endlessly active, full of delightful mirth and a thousand schemes for outwitting the devil of necessity that hunts all brainworkers."

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APH BY ARNOLD GENTHE, N. Y.

PERCY MacKAYE

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

FIVE

PERCY MacKAYE

THE founder of Mr. MacKaye's family in the United States came from Scotland about 1800. His grandfather, Colonel James Morrison MacKaye, a staunch adherent of anti-slavery doctrines, was an intimate friend of Clay, Webster, Garrison and Lincoln. James Steele MacKaye, his father, was a dramatist, theater director and inventor, and wrote many successful plays of his day, conspicuous among which were "Hazel Kirke" and "Paul Kauvar." On his mother's side, Percy MacKaye is of New England Puritan descent. His maternal grandmother was president of one of the earliest women's colleges, and his mother is the author of a published dramatization of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice."

Percy MacKaye was born in New York City, March 16, 1875, and, in that city, he gained, from the constant companionship of his father, much useful knowledge of the theater. In 1892–93 he began his first efforts in poetical lines by writing a series of choral songs for his father's imposing musical drama, "Columbus."

The poet was graduated from Harvard College in 1897, and, a year afterwards, was married to Miss Marion Homer Morse, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and went abroad to live. In Frascati, near Rome, he wrote "A Garland to Sylvia," and in 1905 came "Fenris the Wolf,' another play. Returning to New York in 1900, Mr. MacKaye taught in a private school for boys for three years, and, during this time, E. H. Sothern became interested in his dramatic work and commissioned him to write "The Canterbury Pilgrims," first published in 1903. A year later Mr. MacKaye joined the colony of writers and artists at Cornish, New Hampshire, where he makes his permanent home.

In the "Lincoln Centenary Ode," one of his longer poems, Mr. MacKaye has produced one of the most splendid tributes in literature to this great American. It concludes:

Leave, then, that customed grief
Which honorably mourns its martyred dead,
And newly hail instead
The birth of him, our hardy shepherd chief,
Who by green paths of old democracy
Leads still his tribes to uplands of glad peace.

As long as—out of blood and passion blind—
Springs the pure justice of the reasoning mind,
And justice, bending, scorns not to obey
Pity, that once in a poor manger lay,
As long as, thrall'd by time's imperious will,

Brother had bitter need of brother, still
His presence shall not cease
To lift the ages toward his human excellence,
And races yet to be
Shall in a rude hut do him reverence
And solemnize a simple man's nativity.

Among Mr. MacKaye's published works are: "The Canterbury Pilgrims," a comedy set to music by Reginald de Koven, and originally produced in the Metropolitan Opera House, New York; "Jeanne d'Arc," a tragedy; "Sappho and Phaon," a tragedy; "Fenris the Wolf," a tragedy; "A Garland to Sylvia," a dramatic revelry; "The Scarecrow," a tragedy of the ludicrous; "Mater," a comedy; "The Sistine Eve and Other Poems"; "The Playhouse and the Play," "The Civic Theater," essays and addresses; "Anti-Matrimony," a satirical comedy; "To-Morrow," a play, "Sanctuary," a bird masque; "Saint Louis," a civic masque; "A Thousand Years Ago," a romance of the Orient, and "The Evergreen Tree."

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ROBERT W. SERVICE

Makers of Modern American Poetry
(Men)

SIX

ROBERT SERVICE

WITH "The Songs of a Sourdough" and "The Ballads of a Cheechako," Robert Service established his name and fame as one of the most popular of modern American poets. While we in the States have found little time to delve into the brand of poetry that Canada, as a country, is producing, Masters, Bynner, nor any of our own United States poets, have found more favor with a larger audience than has Service.

An adventurer in the far north, lured by the promises of a gold fortune in the Yukon, like Balboa of old, he found a greater thing than that for which he sought. For here came the inspiration which resulted in such famous lines as these first stanzas from "The Spell of the Yukon":

I wanted the gold, and I sought it;
I scrabbled and mucked like a slave.
Was it famine or scurvy—I fought it;
I hurled my youth into a grave.

I wanted the gold, and I got it—
Came out with a fortune last fall—
Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
And somehow the gold isn't all.

No! There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it
To the deep, deathlike valley below.

Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe; but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth—and I'm one.

Within Service there was a desire that could not be quelled to express the various scenes and adventures through which he was living, and so he gave us his poems of real men—"red-blooded men," who talk in a vigorous tongue, whose primal instincts and passions spur them to labor, to dream, to achieve, to stand against defeat—in fact, human men. These are the men of "The Spell of the Yukon."

Service, an ardent motor enthusiast, enlisted as an ambulance driver early in the war. Stories of the bravery of his exploits cannot be given here, but he has faced the shell-stormed road with his loads of wounded; he has lived the things he writes, and just as he has analyzed the Yukon miner, so has he interpreted the struggles of the soldier of today.

The war stories that Robert Service tells in "Rhymes of a Red Cross Man" are among the most picturesque poems that have been produced as a result of the World War. The same vivid stroke that splashed the pages of his Yukon poems with life and adventure is again evidenced, and with even a stronger amount of feeling than in his earlier work.

Robert Service was born in Preston, England, on January 16, 1874, the son of Robert Service, manager of Preston Bank, and Emily Parker of Preston. He was educated at Hillhead Public School, Glasgow, and afterwards served an apprenticeship with the Commercial Bank of Scotland in the same city.

Service emigrated to Canada and settled on Vancouver Island, where he engaged in farming. He gave up this occupation for an explorer's life, traveling up and down the Pacific Coast, experiencing many hardships.

Tiring of this he finally joined the staff of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, in Victoria, B. C., 1905, and was transferred to White Horse, Yukon Territory, and then to Dawson.

Eight years in the Yukon resulted in his metamorphosis from a bank employee to one of our most important present-day poets.

His books include "Songs of a Sourdough"; "Ballads of a Cheechako"; "Trail of '98"; "Rhymes of a Rolling Stone"; "The Pretender"; and "Rhymes of a Red Cross Man."

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THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

WE have been asked so many times for the name of the author and the full text of "The House by the Side of the Road" that we think it worth while to give the members of The Mentor Association an opportunity to possess a copy of the verses. The author of this very popular and much quoted poem of the road is Sam Walter Foss, a writer of poetry, and, at the time of his death, in 1911, librarian of the Public Library, Somerville, Mass. As far as we know, he has written nothing else that has attracted general attention.

There are hermit souls that live withdrawn
In the place of their self-content;
There are souls like stars that dwell apart
In a fellowless firmament;
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths,
Where highways never ran—
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by—
The men that are good and the men that are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorner's seat
Nor hurl the cynic's ban—
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house by the side of the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men that press with the ardor of hope,
The men that are faint with the strife.
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears,
Both parts of an infinite plan;
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I know there are brook-gladdened meadows ahead,
And mountains of wearisome height;
That the road passes on through the long afternoon
And stretches away to the night.
But still I rejoice when the travelers rejoice
And weep with the strangers that moan,
Nor live in my house by the side of the road,
Like a man who dwells alone.

Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by;
They are good, they are bad; they are weak; they are strong—
Wise, foolish—so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat
Or hurl the cynic's ban?
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

From its first appearance, "The House by the Side of the Road" caught the heart-strings of humanity and struck them into a chord of tender harmonious response. Its spirit of simple, broad humanity entitles the author to claim, like Abou ben Adhem, the right to be "written as one who loves his fellow men."

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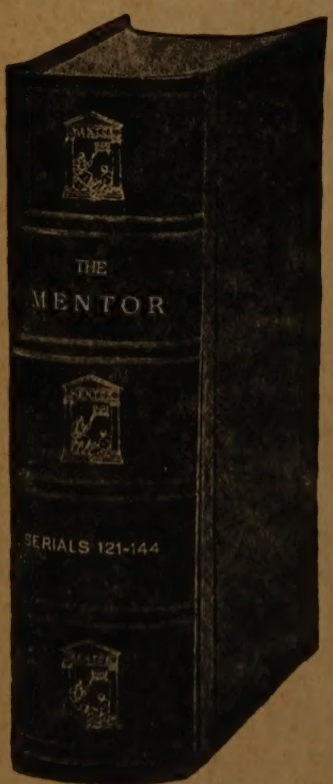

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